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Spring Arbor Jr. Col

Alumni Survey and Analysis
1960

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Coordinator of Alumni Relations

7046

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE
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Spring Arbor Junior College is a small institution of higher education offering courses for the first two years of college preparation very similar to other liberal arts colleges. The alumni of the institution are very important since the college is church-related and receives no financial aid from state or national resources. This importance is carried beyond the area of financial aid as well. They aid in establishing good will with the area churches, recruiting of prospective students and contact with large foundations and corporations.

The writer readily admits that many follow-up studies have been done by secondary schools and colleges. Therefore, this study only has value as one keeps in mind that improvement and progress occur as each institution evaluates its own program.

PURPOSE

It was felt a study was necessary to determine the degree of contribution the institution has made to the alumni through its objectives. I would like to feel this was an exploratory study with very few, if any, hypotheses. The main purpose of the project was to explore the four basic purposes of the college as they relate to the alumni surveyed in their present positions.

The purposes of the college, as stated in the college catalogue, are as follows:

1. Spiritually to become mature, responsible Christians whose lives are dedicated to the service of God and Man. We maintain that this necessitates a personal experience of regeneration and sanctification. This is the basis of per-

sonal and social integrity.

2. Intellectually to understand the world in which they live, including their fellow men. This requires guided exploration in all areas--scientific, social, cultural and religious.

3. Vocationally to make an occupational choice which takes into account their interests and abilities.

4. Personally and Socially to be able to live effectively, creatively and joyfully in the society in which they find themselves.

PROBLEM

The study was done with the intention of trying to discover, "If we as an institution of higher education were accomplishing the goals stated in our purposes." The board of trustees can state their purposes for the institution and the faculty can discuss and challenge them, but the alumni alone are able to evaluate the final outcome of their experiences while in college.

The liberal arts Christian college faces the possibility of being submerged into mediocrity unless it meets the demands of offering a quality program of education in addition to meeting the needs of its students religiously. One of the most logical methods to determine if an institution of higher learning is performing this function is to turn to the alumni for an appraisal of their experiences and receive their suggestions for improvement.

PROCEDURE

The data obtained came from a sampling of 95 alumni of Spring

Arbor Junior College located in the cities of Lansing, Battle Creek, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids and Flint, Michigan. The method of stratified random sampling was employed to select the subjects utilized in the project. It is assumed that a different type of subject is found in these concentrated industrial areas than would be found in predominately agricultural or resort areas. This type of stratification will be offset in the future since it is planned that a project such as this will be conducted in different areas of the state each year.

The instrument employed to obtain the data was a questionnaire consisting of nine typewritten pages. It was so designed that some questions simply required "yes" or "no" answers; others could be answered by the use of a rating scale; while some required a number of answers to one question and open-ended questions were used.

Each subject received the questionnaire via mail approximately ten days before the writer made a personal call upon each one to receive the completed form. A cover letter was enclosed stating the purpose of the questionnaire and soliciting the assistance of each individual concerned. A post card was sent three or four days prior to the personal contact with the subject, reminding each of the questionnaire sent earlier. It took six days to make all the necessary contacts and obtain the completed questionnaire. The personal contact with each alumnus surveyed proved to be a valuable as well as a rewarding experience.

FINDINGS

The questionnaire was sent to 95 alumni living in the cities cited and 65 returned the completed form. This gave a return of 68% and it

would appear to be a very high return considering the length of the questionnaire.

A large amount of data was obtained and after careful screening the items having the most meaning are listed with their percentages.

I. General Information

A. The respondent population was composed of 42% males and 58% females.

B. 69% were married, 28% single and 3% divorced. The average size family of those married was 1.9 children.

C. 83% stated they would recommend Spring Arbor to their own children or friends while 12% were undecided. 86% have returned to their alma mater since their college days.

II. Spiritually

A. 94% of the respondents belong to some church and 5% do not. 82% have their membership with the Free Methodist Church with the remainder belonging to the Methodist, Nazarene and other protestant denominations.

B. 75% were Christians before entering Spring Arbor. 13% became a Christian while attending the college and 2% after they left the campus.

C. 66% regularly give a tenth of their income to support their local church, 23% regularly give less than a tenth, 44% occasionally give to mission projects other than through the local church budget and 35% occasionally give to other charitable and religious organizations.

D. 86% have served as a Sunday school teacher or worker, 42% have been elected to a local church office, 51% have served

as an officer or elector in a church congregation and 7% have been elected to a church denominational office.

9. 77% daily have a definite time of prayer, 41% read devotional books daily, 30% regularly counsel with a minister, 53% share spiritual problems with family or friends, 60% have a time of personal Bible study and 40% occasionally volunteer to serve the church in Christian service.

10. 39% stated their spring break trip was a worthwhile experience and evaluated it in comparison with their orientation toward graduating, 40% felt the winter college experience profitable. Those with more specific professional goals and intellectual interests felt their experience was more beneficial to their Christian maturity.

11. 60% felt the over-all pattern of living demonstrated by the faculty and staff influenced more Christian growth and maturity and stimulated them in Christian growth. 54% stated that special emphases, such as revivals, missionary conventions and chapel crusades were an important part of their Christian experience while on campus, 60% found spiritual encouragement and stimulation to growth through association with other members of the student body.

12. 68% felt they could effectively communicate their personal religious beliefs to some other person, 7.5% stated they could not, while 11% were undecided on this point. 40% thought more required courses dealing with Christianity

would be of value to them in their post-college living, 17% expressed no desire for additional courses in this area and 20% were undecided.

III. Intellectually

A. 40% attended no other college, graduate or professional school after attending Spring Arbor; 45% have either attended or are currently attending one of the above. 46% are contemplating further education, 38% are not, 11% are undecided and 5% did not reply.

B. 35% felt the educational program at Spring Arbor should be a combination of liberal arts and vocational preparation but with main emphasis on the liberal arts, and 48% felt the same combination was important but with main emphasis on vocational preparation.

C. 11% felt the over-all presentation of course materials by their instructors was excellent and very intellectually stimulating, 52% felt it was very good and intellectually stimulating, 29% felt it was adequate and somewhat stimulating, and 3% felt it was inferior and lacking intellectual stimulation.

D. 86% participated in some type of co-curricular activity while on campus and 9% did not.

E. 44% felt they were scholastically and psychologically prepared for their college experience before entering Spring Arbor, 29% felt they were not prepared, 12% were undecided and 15% did not answer the question.

F. 71% stated their college experience had enabled them to

communicate their thoughts and opinions more effectively, 3% felt they had received no help, 9% were undecided and 17% did not answer the question.

G. 37% felt they were intelligently aware of current national and international problems, 15% stated they were not, 23% were undecided and 26% did not answer the question.

H. 48% have engaged in study on their own since graduation either in their major field or in some other field of interest, 24% have not and 28% did not answer the question.

I. 35% have become more critically aware of opinions and ideas as expressed by others as a result of their Spring Arbor training, 16% felt they had not, 26% were undecided 23% did not answer the question.

J. 26% felt their understanding of basic areas of human knowledge is adequate in meeting the demands of our modern society, 11% felt their understanding was not adequate, 37% were undecided and 26% did not answer the question.

IV. Vocationally

A. 23% decided upon their vocation before entering Spring Arbor, 23% while in attendance, 34% after leaving the campus, 3% are still undecided and 17% did not answer the question.

B. The vocational areas of those surveyed were distributed in the following manner: Professional 6%, Semi-Professional 52%, Skilled 8%, and Unskilled 12%. 22% did not list a choice of vocation.

C. 54% graduated from Spring Arbor, 37% did not graduate and

9% did not answer the question. 40% have received a degree higher than the A.A. or A.S., 49% have not and 11% did not answer the question.

D. 42% enthusiastically like their work and would not make a change, 22% enjoy their work but would change if they had an excellent opportunity in another area, 4.5% are indifferent to their work and would change if they had a reasonable opportunity in another area, 1.5% dislike their work and desire very much to change it, 13% are not presently employed and 17% did not answer the question.

E. 15% felt the training received at Spring Arbor made a great contribution to success in their work, 49% stated it made some contribution to success in their work, 6% felt it made no contribution and 30% did not answer the question.

F. The average gross family income is $6,223.

G. 28% felt the college should have made a greater contribution to their vocational planning, 49% did not feel a greater contribution should have been made, 13% were undecided and 10% did not answer the question.

H. 52% stated their Spring Arbor experience enabled them to evaluate intelligently their interests and abilities, 12% did not think this experience helped, 26% were undecided and 10% did not answer the question.

V. Personally and Socially

A. 93% have never run for a public office, 3% have run but were not elected; 58% vote in local elections, 65% vote in state elections, 58% vote in national elections and 34%

vote a split ticket.

B. 20% have been a solicitor for the Red Cross, Community Chest, etc. and 80% have not actively engaged in such activities.

C. 51% have been members of the PTA, school board, or other school-related organizations and 49% have not been actively engaged.

D. 6% have been members of civic and service clubs and 94% have not.

E. 22% are members of a book and phonograph record club or they regularly purchase books and records, 66% are not members, and do not purchase these items, and 12% did not answer the question.

F. 34% attend symphony concerts occasionally and 34% never attend. 48% occasionally attend lectures and 23% never attend. 26% occasionally attend dramatic plays and 42% never attend. 17% occasionally attend movies and 46% never attend. 49% occasionally attend museum exhibits and 21% never attend.

G. 12% stated their Spring Arbor experience contributed substantially toward their understanding of and participation in community, cultural and current affairs, 43% stated it contributed somewhat, 34% felt it made little difference and 11% did not answer the question.

H. 66% feel at ease in meeting and working with people of varying personalities, 9% do not, 8% are undecided and 17% did not answer the question.

INTERPRETATION

The interpretation of the findings is done by the writer with the knowledge that some insights and facts could be interpreted differently. Some of the interpretations given to the data obtained are interpreted with the experience of having made a personal visit to the homes of most of the respondents. It would appear only natural that another observer would be able to interpret the statistics with new and different insights being realized.

I. Spiritually

The majority of alumni of Spring Arbor Junior College would be considered professing Christians and make an affiliation with some protestant church, in most cases the Free Methodist Church. They give considerably above the national average in financial support to their local church and other denominational-supported projects. They are much more concerned with their financial support of the local church than to other charitable organizations.

The entire program of their local church is served very effectively by their leadership and labor in the activities of the Sunday School, youth program and various committees of the total church program. This demands a great deal of the free time of the individuals involved. A daily time of devotional Bible reading and prayer is conducted by most of those who are Christians. A time of personal Bible study is not a regular part of the weekly schedule of the majority and the same statement can be made regarding the time engaged in witnessing to someone pertaining to the Christian life.

A rather small number felt their experiences while on campus were unrealistic and sheltered. This was a surprise in the data obtained, if for no other reason than the fact that the campus is located in a small community with only one church in the village. The majority stated their understanding and insight into their religious beliefs were aided by their experience on campus which caused them to grow into Christian maturity. The close association of faculty with students and students with other students was a major factor that helped one appreciate the Christian fellowship he had received while on campus and carried over into his post-college days.

The ability to express effectively his personal religious beliefs seems to pose no problem for the average alumnus. However, some felt additional required courses on Christianity would be of benefit. The course work would not be in the area of theology but more basic courses relating to Christian experience and living.

II. Intellectually

A large percent of the alumni have either continued their education beyond the junior college level or plan to do additional college work in the future. The number who either drop out of junior college or do not continue their educational program beyond it is fairly high. Our curriculum is so designed to meet the needs of students who plan to continue their educational program into a four-year liberal arts college and to aid those who want a terminal educational program. However, our main emphasis is on the former which is contrary to most

junior colleges. The larger number of alumni felt the curriculum should be a combination of liberal arts and vocational preparation with the latter receiving special emphasis.

The average alumnus feels the over-all presentation of course materials by the instructors was very good and intellectually stimulating. A fairly large number expressed verbally to the writer that more should be required of each student in his intellectual output. Enough alumni felt they were not scholastically and psychologically prepared for college to cause some concern on the part of administrators and faculty members. A continued program of screening applicants prior to entering college and a thorough program of personal counseling would aid in this problem area.

The ability to communicate their thoughts and opinions was strengthened by experience in the classroom and dormitory. A considerable number of alumni were not well enough versed in national and international problems. Possibly they had not been exposed to the literature which covers these two areas. Enough alumni had done additional study in their major field or some field of interest to make one feel they had been stimulated intellectually to seek and gain additional knowledge relating to a given field. The ability to think critically and be objective in their decisions was evidenced by a good number. However, a larger group was still undecided or felt they had not been helped at all in this area to indicate a need for more emphasis upon critical thinking and objective decision-making. The understanding of basic areas of human knowledge to meet the

demands of our present society was weak in the minds of many of the alumni. This could have some relation to the lack of knowledge pertaining to current national and international problems.

III. Vocationally

The choice of vocation was decided by a large enough group after leaving the Spring Arbor campus to cause one to realize that proper vocational counseling was needed during their college freshman an sophomore years. This has been corrected in recent years and should help considerably due to the work being done by the college counselor. The major choice of occupation is in the field of public teaching. This would mean that we would not have a wealthy alumni group, but one that is educationally oriented and would give financial support to a quality educational program.

The percentage of alumni who did not graduate from Spring Arbor could possibly indicate that the student who drops out of college during or after his first year is in need of a vocational school and not a liberal arts college. Most of our alumni enjoy the work they have chosen as a vocation for life and would only change if a good opportunity arose in another area. This satisfaction with their vocation could stem from a sense of purpose through their religious experience. Their training received on campus has contributed only to some degree in their success in their vocation. This would be assumed since only two years of college are offered.

The average gross income per family, stated in the findings was $6,223, is not a true figure. The gross income per family

is lower than this figure. The statement on the questionnaire asked for the combined earnings of husband and wife. Approximately sixteen married couples, both husband and wife being alumni, received the questionnaire and each combined their earnings. This explains the reasoning behind the statement that the amount given above is not a true figure.

The alumni who felt the college should make a greater contribution to their vocational planning stated they needed more personal counseling relating to vocational choices. Many alumni stated their experiences on campus aided them to intelligently evaluate their interests and abilities. This is extremely important that each student is aided in this process of evaluation since this is expressed as a vital part of our vocational purpose as an academic institution.

IV. Personally and Socially

The average alumnus has never run for a public office, but he does take an active part in local, state and national elections by voting. Activities of a civic nature receive very little of their leadership or time to aid worthwhile causes; approximately half of the alumni are active in school functions by participating in PTA and serving on the school board. A very small number belong to civic and service clubs. These findings simply verify the point previously made that the church receives the free time given to charitable organizations.

A relatively small number have membership in a phonograph record club or book club. The cultural opportunities afforded by the cities to the alumni where the survey was made are not

made use of by the majority. This could simply point up the fact that more cultural opportunities should be given our students while on campus. They would have a greater appreciation for activities of this nature. This would encourage them to participate in some of these activities after leaving a college campus.

Many of our alumni feel at ease meeting and working with people of varying personalities. This has been aided by their group experiences on campus as well as their religious standards which aid them to strive to understand and work with all people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Spiritually

A. There is a need for courses to be added to the curriculum in the area of Christian experience and living.

B. Students should have the opportunity to participate in practical Christian service outside their classroom activities.

II. Intellectually

A. The prospective student should be recruited who wants a liberal arts college program and not a vocationally oriented program. We do not have the facilities or faculty for the latter.

B. Faculty members should require the type of intellectual output by their students in their course work which is equal to the first two years on a four year college campus.

C. A course in current affairs would aid the student to seek to know the problems on the national and international scenes.

III. Vocationally

A. The college counselor should interview all college freshmen during their first semester and discuss with them their

vocational interests and abilities.

B. A career day could be established to aid college freshmen and sophomores to make a vocational choice during their first two years of college.

IV. Personally and Socially

A. More programs containing the fine arts should be a part of our lyceum series to introduce our students to the cultural opportunities of our society.

B. The advantages of membership in a civic or service club should be explained to our students. This would help them to seek such membership after graduation.